
Chapter 18.28
SPECIAL PURPOSE (PF, OS and AC) DISTRICTS

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18.28.010 Purposes**(a) Public Facilities District [PF]**

The PF public facilities district is designed to accommodate governmental, public utility, educational, and community service or recreational facilities.

(b) Open Space District [OS]

The purpose and intent of this district is to:

- (1) protect the public health, safety, and welfare;
- (2) protect and preserve open space land as a limited and valuable resource;
- (3) permit the reasonable use of open space land, while at the same time preserving and protecting its inherent open space characteristics to assure its continued availability for the following: as agricultural land, scenic land, recreation land, conservation or natural resource land; for the containment of urban sprawl and the structuring of urban development; and for the retention of land in its natural or near-natural state, and to protect life and property in the community from the hazards of fire, flood, and seismic activity; and
- (4) coordinate with and carry out federal, state, regional, county, and city open space plans.

(c) Agricultural Conservation [AC]

The AC agricultural conservation district is intended to permit agricultural and compatible uses on property intended for preservation and retention essentially in its natural, farmed, or landscaped state.

(Ord. 4964 § 4 (part), 2007)

18.28.020 Definitions

As used in this chapter, unless otherwise apparent from the context, the following definitions shall apply:

- (a) “Conservation or natural resource land” means land which possesses or encompasses conservation or natural resources.
- (b) “Conservation or natural resource” includes, but is not necessarily limited to, streams, watersheds, groundwater recharge, soils, wildlife habitat, as defined in this section, special land forms, and natural vegetation.
- (c) “Open space land” means any parcel or area of land essentially unimproved or in its natural state, and devoted to an open space use as defined in this section, and which is designated in the open space element for an open space use.
- (d) “Open space district” means any area of land or water designated “OS” and subject to all of the terms and regulations of this chapter.
- (e) “Open space use” means the use of land for:
 - (1) Public recreation;
 - (2) Enjoyment of scenic beauty;
 - (3) Conservation or use of natural resources;
 - (4) Production of food or fiber;
 - (5) Protection of persons and their artifacts (buildings, property, etc.);
 - (6) Containment and structuring of urban development.
- (f) “Recreation land” means any area of land or water susceptible to recreational uses.
- (g) “Scenic land” means any area of land or water that possesses scenic qualities worthy of preservation.
- (h) The “Stanford Hoover Pavilion” site is defined as that property designated as Assessor’s Parcel numbers 142-04-011 and 142-04-012.
- (i) “Wildlife habitat” means any area of land or water valuable or necessary to the preservation or enhancement of wildlife resources.

(Ord. 4964 § 4 (part), 2007)

18.28.030 Applicable Regulations

The specific regulations of this chapter and the additional regulations and procedures established by this title shall apply to all Special Purpose Districts.

(Ord. 4964 § 4 (part), 2007)

18.28.040 Land Uses

Table 1 shows the permitted (P) and conditionally permitted (CUP) land uses for the Special Purpose Districts.

**TABLE 1
LAND USES**

	PF	OS	AC	Subject to Regulations in Chapter:
ACCESSORY AND SUPPORT USES				
Accessory facilities and accessory uses		P		Chs. 18.40 and 18.42
Eating and drinking services in conjunction with a permitted use	CUP ⁽¹⁾			
Retail services as an accessory use to the administrative offices of a non-profit organization, provided that such retail services do not exceed 25% of the gross floor area of the combined administrative office services and retail service uses	CUP ⁽¹⁾			
Retail services in conjunction with a permitted use	CUP ⁽¹⁾			
Sale of agricultural products produced on the premises; provided, that no permanent commercial structure for the sale or processing of agricultural products shall be permitted.			P	
Second dwelling units, subject to regulations in Section 18.28.070		P		18.28.070
AGRICULTURAL AND OPEN SPACE USES				
Agricultural Uses, including animal husbandry, crops, dairying, horticulture, nurseries, livestock farming, tree farming, viticulture, and similar uses not inconsistent with the intent and purpose of this chapter		P	P	
Botanical conservatories, outdoor nature laboratories, and similar facilities		P		
Native wildlife sanctuaries		P		
Park uses and uses incidental to park operation	P			
EDUCATIONAL, RELIGIOUS, AND ASSEMBLY USES				
Business or trade schools	CUP ⁽¹⁾			
Churches and religious institutions	CUP ⁽¹⁾			
Educational, charitable, research, and philanthropic institutions		CUP		
Private educational facilities	CUP ⁽¹⁾			
Public or private colleges and universities and facilities appurtenant thereto	CUP			
Special education classes	CUP ⁽¹⁾			
OFFICE USES				
Administrative office services for non-profit organizations	CUP ⁽¹⁾			

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	PF	OS	AC	Subject to Regulations in Chapter:
OTHER USES				
Other uses which, in the opinion of the director, are similar to those listed as permitted or conditionally permitted uses	CUP ⁽¹⁾			
PUBLIC/QUASI-PUBLIC FACILITY USES				
All facilities owned or leased, and operated or used, by the City of Palo Alto, the County of Santa Clara, the State of California, the government of the United States, the Palo Alto Unified School District, or any other governmental agency	P			
Communication Facilities		CUP		
Community Centers	CUP ⁽¹⁾			
Utility Facilities	CUP	CUP	CUP	
RECREATIONAL USES				
Neighborhood recreation centers	CUP ⁽¹⁾			
Outdoor recreation services	CUP ⁽¹⁾		CUP	
Recreational uses including riding academies, clubs, stables, country clubs, and golf courses		CUP		
Youth clubs	CUP ⁽¹⁾			
RESIDENTIAL USES				
Single-family dwellings		P		
Manufactured housing (including mobile homes on permanent foundations)		P		18.40.
Guest ranches		CUP		
Residential care facilities, when utilizing existing structures on the site	CUP ⁽¹⁾			
Residential Care Homes		P		
Residential use, and accessory buildings and uses customarily incidental to permitted dwellings; provided, however, that such permitted dwellings shall be for the exclusive use of the owner or owners, or lessee or lessor of land upon which the permitted agricultural use is conducted, and the residence of other members of the same family and bona fide employees of the aforementioned			P	
SERVICE USES				
Animal care, including boarding and kennels		CUP	CUP	
Cemeteries			CUP	
Cemeteries, not including mausolea, crematoria, or columbaria		CUP		
Small day care homes		P		
Large day care homes		CUP		
Day care centers	CUP ⁽¹⁾			

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	PF	OS	AC	Subject to Regulations in Chapter:
Art, dance, gymnastic, exercise or music studios or classes	CUP ⁽¹⁾			
Medical Services:				
Hospitals	CUP			
Outpatient medical facilities with associated medical research	CUP			
TEMPORARY USES				
Temporary parking facilities, provided that such facilities shall remain no more than five years	CUP ⁽¹⁾			
TRANSPORTATION USES				
Airports and airport-related uses	CUP ⁽¹⁾			

1. Provided such use is conducted on property owned by the City of Palo Alto, the County of Santa Clara, the State of California, the government of the United States, the Palo Alto Unified School District, or any other governmental agency, and leased for said uses.

(Ord. 4964 § 4 (part), 2007)

18.28.050 Site Development Standards

(a) Development Standards

The development standards for the special purpose districts are specified in Table 2, provided that more restrictive regulations may be recommended by the Architectural Review Board, pursuant to Section 18.76.020 of the Palo Alto Municipal Code.

**TABLE 2
SPECIAL PURPOSE DISTRICT SITE DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS**

	PF	OS	AC	Subject to Regulations in Chapter:
Minimum Site Specifications				
Site Area (acres)		10	5	
Site Width (ft)			250	
Site Depth (ft)			250	
Minimum Setbacks (ft)	<i>Setback lines imposed by a special setback map pursuant to Chapter 20.08 of this code shall apply</i>			
Front Setback	– ⁽²⁾	30	30	20.08
Rear Setback	– ⁽²⁾	30	30	
Interior Side Setback	– ⁽²⁾	30	15	
Street Side Setback	– ⁽²⁾	30	24	

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	PF	OS	AC	Subject to Regulations in Chapter:
Maximum Floor Area Ratio	1:1 ⁽³⁾			
Site Coverage and Impervious Coverage				18.28.070(l)
Maximum Site Coverage	30% ⁽³⁾		10%	
Additional Site Area permitted covered by impervious ground surfaces			10% ⁽¹⁾	
Maximum Impervious Coverage		3.5% ⁽⁴⁾		
Height Restrictions				18.28.060(a)
Maximum Height (ft)	50	25	35	
Maximum Height within 150 feet of a residential district (ft)	35			
Maximum Number of Stories		2		
Daylight Plane for site lines abutting a residential district				
Initial height (ft)	10			
Slope	1:2			
Residential Density			1 unit/acre	

- (1) For cemetery uses, all markers of graves shall be flush with grade level, and shall be considered impervious area under this requirement.
- (2) The minimum front, side, and rear yards in the PF public facilities district shall be equal to the respective front, side, and rear yards required in the most restrictive abutting district; provided, that no yard adjoining a street shall be less than 20 feet and that no interior yard shall be less than 10 feet.
- (3) Provided that, for parking facilities the maximum floor area ratio and site coverage shall be equal to the floor area ratio and site coverage established by the most restrictive adjacent district, and provided, further, that the maximum floor area ratio for the Stanford Hoover Pavilion site shall be .25:1.
- (4) Including buildings and all impervious ground surfaces, and provided that where a portion of a subdivision with clustered lots of less than ten acres in size contains an area rendered undevelopable by an open space restriction, the impervious coverage which would otherwise be allotted to this undevelopable area shall be transferred to those lots within the subdivision on which development will be permitted in a proportional manner based on lot size.

(Ord. 4964 § 4 (part), 2007)

18.28.060 Additional PF District Design Requirements

The following additional regulations shall apply in the PF district:

(a) Recycling Storage

All new development, including approved modifications that add thirty percent or more floor area to existing uses, shall provide adequate and accessible interior areas or exterior enclosures for the storage of recyclable materials in appropriate containers. The design,

construction and accessibility of recycling areas and enclosures shall be subject to approval by the architectural review board, in accordance with design guidelines adopted by that board and approved by the city council pursuant to Section 16.48.070.

(b) Employee Shower Facilities

Employee shower facilities shall be provided for any new building constructed or for any addition to or enlargement of any existing building as specified in Table 3.

**TABLE 3
EMPLOYEE SHOWERS REQUIRED**

Uses	Gross Floor Area of New Construction (ft ²)	Showers Required
All government or special district facilities designed for employee occupancy, colleges and universities, private educational facilities, business and trade schools and similar uses	0 – 9,999	No requirement
	10,000 – 19,999	1
	20,000 – 49,999	2
	50,000 and up	4

(c) Landscaping of Yards

- (1) All required interior yards (setbacks) abutting or opposite a residential district shall be planted and maintained as a landscaped screen.
- (2) For sites abutting a residential district, a solid wall or fence between 5 and 8 ft in height shall be shall be constructed and maintained along the common site line.

(d) Transfer of Development Rights*

- (1) The city council by resolution may, from time to time, designate one or more city-owned buildings that are Category 1 or Category 2 on the city’s historic inventory and/or Category I, II, or III on the city’s seismic hazards identification list as eligible to participate as “sender sites” in the Transfer of Development Rights program as provided in Chapters 18.18 and 18.64.
- (2) Before any transferable development rights are offered for sale, the city manager shall establish, in writing, a public process using the city’s formal bidding procedures to sell bonus floor area development rights from any sites so designated by the city council.
- (3) Before formally soliciting the participation of other organizations or agencies in the rehabilitation of a city-owned historic building, the city should have a historic structures report prepared by a qualified expert in accordance with the standards and guidelines of the California State Office of Historic Preservation.
- (4) Before concluding a sale of transferable development rights for any city building, the city shall comply with Section 18.18.080.
- (5) The city manager shall establish and maintain a special fund into which all proceeds of the sale of transferable rights, and any interest thereon, shall be deposited. Upon receipt and entry into the accounting records for the fund such monies shall be considered

* **Editor’s Note:** Subsection (d) derives from former Section 18.32.090, as adopted by § 2 of Ord. 4862.

committed to the rehabilitation of the city-owned building from which the development rights were sold, or to the rehabilitation of other city-owned buildings in the Historic Category 1 or 2 or Seismic Hazard Categories I, II, or III.

(Ord. 4964 §§ 4 (part), 16, 2007)

18.28.070 Additional OS District Regulations

The following additional regulations shall apply in the OS district:

(a) Second Dwelling Units

Not more than one attached or detached second dwelling units shall be allowed on a lot in the OS district, and shall be subject to the following regulations:

- (1) Second dwelling units shall be subject to the following development requirements:
 - (A) Second dwelling units shall only be permitted on sites with a minimum actual site area of 10 acres
 - (B) Maximum size of living area: 900 square feet
 - (C) Maximum size of covered parking area: 200 square feet
 - (D) Maximum height, as measured to the highest point of the building: 17 feet
 - (E) Maximum number of habitable floors: 1
- (2) The second dwelling unit shall have street access from a driveway in common with the main residence. Separate driveway access may be permitted upon a determination that separate access will result in fewer environmental impacts such as excessive paving, unnecessary grading or unnecessary tree removal, and that such separate access will not create the appearance, from the street, of a lot division.
- (3) The second dwelling shall be architecturally compatible with the main residence with respect to style, roof pitch, color and materials.

(b) Site and Design Approval

All sites in the OS district shall be subject to the Site Design and Review Combining District (D) as provided in Chapter 18.30(G) of this title.

(c) Geological Soils Investigation and Report

- (1) All applications for site and design approval shall be accompanied by a combined in-depth geologic and soils investigation and report prepared by a registered geologist certified by the state of California as an engineering geologist, and by a licensed civil engineer qualified in soil mechanics. Such report shall be based on surface, subsurface, and laboratory investigations and examinations and shall fully and clearly present:
 - (A) All pertinent data, interpretations, and evaluations;
 - (B) The significance of the data, interpretations, and evaluations with respect to the actual development or implementation of the intended land uses, and with respect to the effect upon future geological processes both on and off the site;

- (C) Recommendations for any additional investigations that should be made. All costs and expenses incurred as a result of the requirements of this section, including the costs and expense of an independent review of the material submitted under this chapter by qualified persons retained by the city, shall be borne by the applicant.
- (2) The requirement of subsection (1) may be waived by the city engineer for accessory facilities and landscaping where such improvements, in his opinion, would pose no potential hazard to life or property on the subject or surrounding properties.

(d) Landscaping

The existing natural vegetation and land formations shall remain in a natural state unless modification is found to be necessary for a specific use allowed in this chapter through the site and design approval procedure. Reduction or elimination of fire hazards will be required where heavy concentrations of flammable vegetation occur. Landscaping as may be necessary and required shall be consistent with the purpose of this chapter.

- (1) Landscaping shall be designed and installed consistent with the requirements and guidelines of Section 18.40.130 (Landscaping) of the Zoning Ordinance, and in particular with subsection 18.40.130(c) regarding landscaping in natural areas, as well as with the relevant Comprehensive Plan policies outlined in subsection (o) below. Exceptions to tree removal restrictions may be made for invasive species such as eucalyptus trees.
- (2) The property owner shall ensure the survival of tree plantings for a period of a minimum of five years. The owner shall install any replacement trees and monitor their survival. A certified arborist shall prepare a report at the end of the five-year period documenting the condition of the trees and said report shall be forwarded to the Department of Planning and Community Environment for review. Any subsequent owner(s) shall also be obligated to replace any trees that die with trees of the same size and species stated on the approved building permit plans.

(e) Fencing Restriction

No barbed wire, or similar fencing having a cutting edge, may be installed except:

- (1) To protect a vegetative community or wildlife habitat until it is fully established, subject to the imposition of reasonable time limits through site and design review pursuant to Chapter 18.30(G); and
- (2) To enclose utility facilities, including, but not limited to, water or sewage pumps, storage tanks, and wells.

(f) Tree Removal

Removal of live trees shall be permitted only as provided in Title 8.

(g) Access to Remote Areas

Roads, tracks, driveways, trails, or runways for automobiles, trucks, buses, or motorcycles or other wheeled vehicles shall not be developed except upon the securing of site and design approval. No such approval shall be granted except upon finding that the purpose for which

the roads, tracks, driveways, trails, or runways are proposed is essential for the establishment or maintenance of a use which is expressly permitted in this chapter and that the design and location of the proposed roads, tracks, driveways, trails, or runways will be compatible with the terrain. The use of all roads, tracks, driveways, trails, or runways existing at the time of the adoption of this chapter which are nonconforming or have been established without proper approvals shall be terminated and shall be returned to natural terrain unless given approval in accordance with the regulations set forth in this chapter.

(h) Grading

No grading for which a grading permit is required shall be authorized except upon the securing of site and design approval. No such approval shall be granted except upon a finding that the purpose for which the grading is proposed is essential for the establishment or maintenance of a use which is expressly permitted in this chapter and that the design, scope, and location of the grading proposed will be compatible with adjacent areas and will result in the least disturbance of the terrain and natural land features. All grading for which no permits or approvals are required shall be subject to the provisions set forth in this chapter.

(i) Soil Erosion and Land Management

No site and design plan shall be approved unless it includes soil erosion and sediment control measures in accordance with any adopted procedures, technical standards, and specifications of the planning commission. No approval will be granted unless all needed erosion control measures have been completed or substantially provided for in accordance with said standards and specifications. The applicant shall bear the final responsibility for the installation and construction of all required erosion control measures according to the provisions of said standards and specifications.

(j) Subdivision

All divisions of land into four or more parcels shall be designed on the cluster principle and shall be designed to minimize roads; to minimize cut, fill, and grading operations; to locate development in less rather than more conspicuous areas; and to achieve the purpose of this chapter.

(k) Substandard Lots

Any parcel of land not meeting the area or dimension requirements of this chapter is a lawful building site if such parcel was a lawful building site on July 5, 1972. All other requirements of this chapter shall apply to any such parcel.

(l) Impervious Coverage

Impervious coverage shall be limited to 3.5% of the site, and shall be calculated to include all building coverage, plus paved surfaces including but not limited to driveways, parking areas, sports or tennis courts, swimming pools, patios or decks, subject to exceptions and provisions as follows:

- (1) Portions of primary driveways located in scenic setbacks shall not be counted as impervious if predominantly constructed of pervious paving materials up to a width of 20 feet.

- (2) Primary driveways composed of a gravel surface shall not be counted as impervious up to a width of 20 feet, and subject to staff determination that gravel is a functional surface material.
- (3) Primary driveways are those that extend from the nearest access road to the garage or carport providing required parking for the main residence.
- (4) Proposed pervious paving materials for driveways shall only be permitted if acceptable to the Palo Alto Fire Department.
- (5) Areas excluded from impervious coverage pursuant to approvals granted prior to July 1, 2007 shall remain excluded from impervious coverage calculations, unless the surfacing material is altered to a less permeable material.

(m) Light and Glare

Exterior lighting should be low-intensity and shielded from view so it is not directly visible from off-site. Skylights shall not use clear or white glass and shall not be illuminated from directly below the skylight, to avoid glare at night. All new windows and glass doors shall be of a non-reflective material.

(n) Story Poles and Other Visual Review Aids

Story poles (with associated taping or flagging) shall be erected for projects involving new residences or other structures, or for substantial additions to new residences, for the purpose of providing a better understanding of the visual impacts of a proposal in the OS district. Story poles shall accurately outline the perimeter and key and highest rooflines of the proposed structure(s) and shall be durable and sturdy enough to be visible from distant views. Story poles shall be constructed to the satisfaction of the director prior to notice of a hearing and shall remain in place through the public hearing date. Erection of story poles prior to public hearing notice may be required by the director to allow for staff and neighbors to view the project. Other aids, such as taping the perimeter of other development (structures, pools, sport courts, etc.) on the site and identifying trees to be removed, may also be required by the director. Story poles shall be removed upon final action on a project or upon the direction of the director.

(o) Open Space Review Criteria

In addition to the above provisions and development standards in Table 2, the following criteria shall be considered in the Site and Design review of all development of land in the OS district, as outlined in the Conservation Element of the Comprehensive Plan:

- (1) The development should not be visually intrusive from public roadways and public parklands. As much as possible, development should be sited so it is hidden from view.
- (2) Development should be located away from hilltops and designed to not extend above the nearest ridge line.
- (3) Site and structure design should take into consideration impacts on privacy and views of neighboring property.

- (4) Development should be clustered, or closely grouped, in relation to the area surrounding it to make it less conspicuous, minimize access roads, and reduce fragmentation of natural habitats.
- (5) Built forms and landscape forms should mimic the natural topography. Building lines should follow the lines of the terrain, and trees and bushes should appear natural from a distance.
- (6) Existing trees with a circumference of 37.5 inches, measured 4.5 feet above the ground level, should be preserved and integrated into the site design. Existing vegetation should be retained as much as possible.
- (7) Cut is encouraged when it is necessary for geotechnical stability and to enable the development to blend into the natural topography. Fill is generally discouraged and should never be distributed within the driplines of existing trees. Locate development to minimize the need for grading.
- (8) To reduce the need for cut and fill and to reduce potential runoff, large, flat expanses of impervious surfaces should be avoided.
- (9) Buildings should use natural materials and earthtone or subdued colors.
- (10) Landscaping should be native species that require little or no irrigation. Immediately adjacent to structures, fire retardant plants should be used as a fire prevention technique.
- (11) Exterior lighting should be low-intensity and shielded from view so it is not directly visible from off-site.
- (12) Access roads should be of a rural rather than urban character. (Standard curb, gutter, and concrete sidewalk are usually inconsistent with the foothills environment.)

(p) Standard Conditions of Approval

The director shall maintain a list of standard project conditions for projects in the OS district that reflect the intent of the OS criteria. Conditions may address, but are not limited to, landscaping, tree protection, planting, and maintenance, lighting, roofing materials, grading, construction staging, and fire protection.

(Ord. 4964 § 4 (part), 2007)

18.28.080 Additional AC District Design Requirements

The following additional regulations shall apply in the AC district:

(a) Site and Design Approval

All sites in the AC district shall be subject to the Site and Design (D) Review Combining District regulations as provided in Chapter 18.30(G).

(b) Location of Agricultural Facilities

Barns, stables, sheds, chicken houses, and other similar facilities for the shelter and feeding of animals, exclusive of domestic household pets, shall be located a minimum of 40 feet from any site line.

(Ord. 4964 § 4 (part), 2007)

18.28.090 Parking and Loading

Off-street parking and loading facilities shall be required for all permitted and conditional uses in accord with Chapter 18.40. All parking and loading facilities on any site, whether required as minimums or optionally provided in addition to minimum requirements, shall comply with the regulations and the design standards established by Chapter 18.42. In addition, parking facilities shall be subject to the following regulations:

(a) PF District

In the PF district, no required parking space shall be located in the first 10 feet adjoining the street property line of any required yard.

(b) OS District

In the OS district, no parking space shall be located in a required front or side yard or in a special setback.

(c) AC District

In the AC district, no required parking space shall be located in a required front yard or required street side yard.

(Ord. 4964 § 4 (part), 2007)

18.28.100 Grandfathered Uses

In the OS district, accessory dwellings and guest cottages existing on April 28, 1986, and which prior to that date were lawful, conforming permitted uses may remain as legal nonconforming uses. Such uses shall be permitted to remodel, improve or replace site improvements on the same site, without necessity to comply with site development regulations for continual use and occupancy by the same use; provided that any such remodeling, improvement or replacement shall not add a kitchen nor result in increased floor area, number of dwelling units, height, length or any other increase in the size of the improvement without complying with the standards set forth in Section 18.28.070(a) and without applying for and receiving a conditional use permit.

(Ord. 4964 § 4 (part), 2007)

